Bald Mountain and Bald Bluff Mountain

Amherst

Description:

The uplands extending from Bald Mountain to Bald Bluff Mountain include a series of north-south running ridges with elevation between 700 to 750 feet. The summit of Bald Mountain supports one of the largest naturally occurring Red Pine Woodlands in the state, and the upper slopes of Bald Bluff Mountain support a Spruce - Fir - Broom-moss forest with little to no signs of recent harvesting. Ridgelines and valley drainages connecting these summits support a variety of upland and wetland forests in good condition. The area also supports several remote ponds.

Red Pine Woodland, Bald Mountain

The approximately 60-acre red pine woodland atop the rocky summit of Bald Mountain extends northward along a narrow ridge. Stunted red pine (*Pinus resinosa*) is dominant, with scattered eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus)* trees and saplings. Tree cover is scattered and sparse (less than 50% cover, basal area of roughly 25 square feet/acre), and timber volume is low. Some of the larger red pines have been cored and found to be aged at approximately 40-50 years old. Black huckleberry (*Gaylussacia baccata*) and low-bush blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*) are the main herb layer components. Other plant species noted are common hairgrass (*Deschampsia flexuos*a), three-toothed cinquefoil (*Sibbaldiopsis tridentata*), poverty oatgrass (*Danthonia spicata*), and the sedge *Carex cumulata* -- all species indicative of barren outcrop communities. Lichens (primarily *Cladina* spp.) cover most of the exposed bedrock. Charcoal was found in the thin soil. Based on a series of tree cores and soil samples, it appears that this stand may have originated (or at least been enhanced by) the fires of 1947. Common nighthawks, an uncommon (S4) but not rare breeding bird in Maine, have been known to nest amid the lichen-dominated openings of the red pine woodland.

Lower slopes of Bald Mountain support a beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) and sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) dominated hardwood forest that show signs of past selective cutting and more recent (January 1998) ice storm damage.

The northern summit of Bald Bluff Mountain harbors an approximately 80 acre spruce - fir broom-moss forest with little to no sign of recent harvest. Red spruce (*Picea rubens*) is dominant throughout the summit area with an average tree canopy height of 80 feet and a few super-canopy trees extending over 100 feet. Three red spruce trees cored in this forest with diameters of 26-29 inches yielded ages ranging from 135-205 years.

The open acidic rocky summit on the top of Bald Bluff Mountain is a few acres. Scattered red spruce trees and saplings grow on thin soils and exposed bedrock, with low-growing shrubs such as lowbush blueberry, sheet laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*), and huckleberry frequent. Three-leaved cinquefoil, a characteristic plant of this habitat, occurs in small patches.

Further to the southeast of the main ridge, a mature northern hardwood forest occurs along an east facing drainage. Sugar maple and beech dominate the overstory, with typical understory and herbaceous species including striped maple, hobblebush (*Viburnum lantanoides*), spinulose wood fern (*Dryopteris intermedia*), and mountain sorrel (*Oxalis montana*). There is no sign of recent cutting or ice storm damage, and several maple trees exceed 25 inches in diameter. Based on former Champion stand data, however, this tolerant hardwood stand is relatively small and is bordered by an early- to mid-successional intolerant hardwood forest to the north. It is probably not large enough therefore to be significant at the statewide level.

Much of the mid- and lower slope of the west side of Bald Bluff Mountain supports mixed hardwood stands that have been recently harvested. There is also a sizeable mixed coniferous forest, chiefly dominated by hemlock, that has not been harvested. Beaver activity has killed some of the softwoods in a low-lying drainage.

Other interesting but small natural communities in this area include an approximately 5-acre, post-fire talus forest of paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*) and yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*) and a 2-acre dwarf shrub bog in a bedrock depression.

The unnamed peak just south of Partridge Pond also has scattered red pine, but the red pine is not abundant enough to comprise a red pine woodland community as eastern white pine and red spruce are equally common. The uncommon (but not rare) hillside blueberry (*Vaccinium pallidum*) occurs here as well.

Rare Species and Exemplary Natural Community Table for the Bald Mountain & Bald Bluff Mountain Area

Common Name	Latin Name	S-RANK	G-RANK	State Status
Exemplary Natural Communities				
Red Pine Woodland		S3	N/A	N/A
Lower Elevation Spruce-FirForest		S4	N/A	N/A

Other Habitats Mapped by MDIFW:
Waterfowl/Wading Bird Habitat

Conservation Considerations:

- The red pine woodland is among the best examples in the state of this community type. It is a fire-adapted natural community that in the absence of fire may revert to a more mesic white pine - red pine forest. Nonetheless, the ecological effects of harvesting on red pine woodlands and barrens are not known. Given its low volume, thin soils, and ecological uniqueness, this red pine stand may not be desirable from a harvesting standpoint.

- The remote area between Bald Mountain and Bald Bluff Mountain forms a several thousand acre block of relatively intact, unfragmented forest, with a number of undeveloped pond shores and small wetlands. Blocks of this size and condition are increasingly uncommon in Down East Maine.

- The Bald Bluff Mountain spruce-fir forest is mature, relatively undisturbed, and fairly large. Other small but good quality natural communities adjacent to it (acidic summit and northern hardwood forest) add to the significance of this area.

Protection Status

This area is all in private industrial ownership. For the areas marked as exemplary natural communities, the current landowner (International Paper) has established a combination of Special Value Areas and Special Protection Areas where timber management is secondary to natural resource values.